POV

Issues to ponder when considering Point of View

To what degree can you trust the document? What limitations and biases might be present? How does the person’s writer’s position/background affect the legitimacy and credibility of the document? When and where did they write it, in other words what’s the historical context and how does that affect the legitimacy and credibility? Is this a first hand observation/participant or was this an event that happened earlier, and if so how much earlier? How might that color the writing? Does the style of writing effect the credibility and legitimacy? What motivated the writer to create this document?

POV IS NOT A BLACK/WHITE ISSUE BUT ONE OF SHADES OF GRAY. Read critically. You don’t need to destroy the credibility of the author but simply mention that which tends to make it more or less likely to be accurate.

Examples- An internal government memo is much different than a campaign speech. A person who writes against their interests is much different than someone who writes something in support of their own view. Time can lead to false memories but can also allow someone to look at an issue more objectively. Preconceptions can lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy. Statistics and tables can be skewed because someone is looking for a specific result (ie the form of a question in a survey) or it may have been collected for a whole other reason irrespective of the issue at hand. Even if it was irrespective it may be a poor or misleading statistic.

Who wrote the document and what difference might it make in whether you fully, partially or deny its’ content?

Expert? Government Official (and what capacity)? Religious figure? Participant in the event? Peasant? Anonymous?

Where is the person from? Context, Context, Context---What bias (everyone has bias!—bias isn’t necessarily bad— example: I’m biased to believe what people say at face value --) may arise due to their location?

Contemporary to the event or writing about the past? What biases or limitations might a contemporary have? What biases or limitations would someone have who wasn’t present?

Who are they writing too? Is it a private letter to another government official, a newspaper editorial? A news article? A pamphlet? A speech? How does the forum of the writing effect your acceptance of the material in the document?

What’s the tone of the writing? Is it argumentative? Somber? Detailed? Rhetorical? Jocular? Sarcastic?

When they author chose their words did they choose language that is likely to press people’s buttons (loaded language)?

Example—Taxes that are paid by an estate after someone’s death are known as inheritance taxes, someone who believes strongly they are unfair calls them “death taxes” so as to inflame public opinion or simply make a point. People who favor abortion don’t call themselves pro-abortion but pro-choice. People who are against abortion call themselves right to life.

If it’s a table or statistic-What makes you think it’s accurate? Does it provide any detail on where the material is from? Would there be a reason why the person who created the table/statistic may have wanted to sway opinion (often statistics are just---statistics!).

Cartoon—how do they portray different characters etc…what feelings does it create in the reader/observer?